



# Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns

Affirmation: United Methodist for  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and  
Transgendered Concerns  
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# Affirmation

## A call to resistance

In May, 2000, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church decided, once again, to retain both its statement that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and its policies of discrimination. Once again, the UMC acted contrary to the teachings of Jesus, who was so quick to assert that love, justice and inclusion are far more important to God than purity laws. This is a travesty and an outrage. Affirmation calls upon all people of conscience to resist such injustice in every arena.

Within Affirmation, we see many paths of resistance. Some find energy for leaving or for organizing for institutional separation. Others will work within The United Methodist Church, creatively resisting the discriminatory language and practices at every opportunity. Regardless of whether we stay or leave as individuals, Affirmation will honor the different pathways we take and look toward a time when all people will worship in sacred, just and inclusive space.

*Issued by the National Council of  
Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian,  
Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered  
Concerns.*

## RESIST!

At its May 2000 General Conference[GC], the UMC continued a policy of discrimination against its lesbian and gay members that is incompatible with the teachings of Christ. Jesus said that the greatest law was to love God and neighbor. He claimed that whoever hurt even the least of all people hurt him. He spoke, ate and reveled with outcasts, teaching that justice, mercy and inclusion were far more important than purity laws.

Ignoring the example of Jesus, the UMC has elevated an offhand comment by Paul, the same fallible man who told women to keep silent in the church and instructed a slave to return to his master, into an essential of Christian teaching. This is an

outrage! It is also not the first time that the church has adopted policies incompatible with the teachings of Christ. It took a similar path with the subject of slavery.

## Plan to attend Affirmation's Pre-Convo event Thursday, July 26

Begin your Revival experience with Affirmation. Experience a day packed with information and activities: a time to explore spiritual development [see **Please join us for the day**, page 7], to learn about chapter formation, and to participate in the inaugural "listening post" sponsored by the Strategic Visioning/Planning Team.

## Affirmation celebrates the completion of twenty five years

Launching Eighteen-Months of Strategic Visioning for our future!

The first Listening Post for members, constituents and friends will occur July 26th during Affirmation's Pre-Convo Forum at the RMN Convocation, University of Puget Sound [see **Long range planning process**, page 4].

Launching a Fund Development venture!  
A Fund Development Team has already begun exciting and creative work [see **Join the journey**, page 5].

Launching a search for Constituent Writings toward a potential Anthology!

Will you help us locate articles, essays, prose or poetry written by Affirmation constituents over our 25 years?

INVITING members, constituents and friends to celebrate together July 26-29 at the RMN Reconciling Ministries Network Convocation!

**Friday, July 27, 5:30p.m. Banquet**, Rotunda Room, University of Puget Sound. Founding and early Affirmation leaders will be honored. *Dinner reservations are due by July 20, 2001*

**Saturday, July 28, 9:00p.m. Dance**. See page 13 for more information about this weekend events.

*See Resist!, page 2*

## Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of  
lesbian, gay, bisexual,  
transgendered people organized to  
speak for ourselves.  
Together we:

proclaim a gospel of respect, love  
and justice;

relentlessly pursue policies and  
processes that support full  
participation of lesbian, gay,  
bisexual, and transgendered  
people in all areas and levels of  
The United Methodist Church;

overcome the barriers that diminish  
our common humanity by excluding  
or judging people because of their  
race, gender, class or physical  
abilities;

empower people to undertake  
works of inclusion and justice  
where they are.

## Affirmation Newsletter

is a quarterly publication. The  
official views of Affirmation are  
stated by the Co-Spokespersons.  
Opinions offered in signed  
columns, letters and articles are  
those of the writers and do not  
necessarily represent the opinions  
of Affirmation.

To save space in this newsletter:  
United Methodist Church  
= UMC  
United Methodist = UM  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and  
Transgendered = LGBT

Editor  
David L. Gunnell  
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## Information

All Affirmation correspondence are  
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## Resist! *from page 1*

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming release to the captives. John Wesley spoke and worked against slavery, and Methodist tradition in the Americas began with a strong African presence and a prohibition of slaveholding among members. But then, driven by fear of schism, the church retreated from its anti-slavery position, accommodating to forces of power and culture. In 1840, the GC determined that slaveholding was no bar to ministry or episcopacy.

The Methodist Episcopal Church [MEC] was incompatible with the teachings of Christ, and anguished souls cried out. Throughout more than half a century, people resisted. Many left, telling their reasons as they did. Despite bans on petitions and refusals to ordain or appoint, abolitionists would not be silenced. African Americans formed communities of resistance which would eventually become the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches.

In 1842, galvanized by the actions of the 1840 GC, Orange Scott and La Roy Sunderland began the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, leading thousands out of the MEC. Realizing that schism could come from either side of the struggle, in 1844 the Methodist Episcopal Church determined once again that slaveholding, not abolitionism, was incompatible with Christ's teachings.

When the people of God act against the will of God, God calls up mighty forces of resistance and change. It was and is still so. We see resistance taking many forms. Some resist by leaving, refusing to be a part of a church that discriminates. Some imagine how people might leave The UMC, not merely as individuals, but as congregations, conferences, jurisdictions. Some speak out, insisting they will follow the demands of ministry and justice, not unjust laws. Some act in community, signing declarations, determining that their local church will be a Reconciling Congregation, devising congregational plans for celebrating the covenants of same-gender couples. Some act even as Jurisdictions, declaring that they will not be silenced, that they will work for the full inclusion of LGBT people in United Methodism. What the "winners" in the GC vote haven't understood is that you cannot force Protestants to act and live against their consciences. That is, in fact, the very root of Protestantism. We call upon UM who know the gifts and grace of faithful, Christian LGBT people: RESIST!

Speak out as individuals, gay or straight. Come out, tell your stories, claim your truths, make your stands: resist!

Join together in Affirmation, as Reconciling United Methodists, in MFSA, in caucuses, gatherings, e-lists, and networks, creating pockets of truth-telling all over the church: resist! Join together as clergy, support one another, do not certify charges for trial, refuse to convict, refuse to ask questions, refuse to answer questions, use the powers of definition, be creative: resist!

Join together as laity. Bring your congregations into the Reconciling Congregations Program, make plans for celebrating covenants, send petitions to annual conference, declare your congregations havens of justice and welcome: resist!

Join together as scholars and teachers. Create reconciling seminaries, campus ministries. Tell the stories of earlier resisters and schisms. Teach the long path of change. Provide theological, ethical and Biblical grounding for resistance and change: resist!

Join together as visionaries. Imagine the Church as it could be, as it ought to be and how to get from here to there. Imagine separation, renewal, schism, regrowth. Imagine belonging to a church you wouldn't cringe about. Do not be silenced: resist!

*See Resist!, page 3*

## Resist!

from page 2

Join together as bishops. Challenge the homophobia of your colleagues, hold yourselves and the church accountable to the vision of inclusiveness built into our constitution, repudiate lazy scholarship and Biblical illiteracy: resist!

Tell your followers to be quiet, the authorities demanded. If you silence them, Jesus replied, the very stones will cry out. They do, and will, all over the church. They, and we, will not be silenced. Not now, not ever. Believe it, and resist!

*Jeanne Knepper*

## Mission Statement

The Affirmation National Council has modified our mission statement to read:

"Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered people and their families and friends organized to speak with the voice of LGBT people. Together we:

proclaim a gospel of respect, love and justice;  
relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people in all areas and levels of The United Methodist Church;

overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class, or physical abilities;  
empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Affirmation seeks to:

coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;  
respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;  
sponsor education and information services;  
inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses."

In making changes to the mission statement, the National Council wants to retain the identity of Affirmation as a caucus that speaks with the voice of LGBT people while acknowledging and celebrating our straight friends and family members, many of whom are very dedicated to the vision and work of Affirmation.

## Affirmation National Council Goes to Work

Your National Affirmation Council made a strong statement of commitment to work to effect change within the United Methodist Church when it met last October, the first time since General Conference 2000 in Cleveland, OH.

The Council made a strong statement by regrouping into specialized committees in order to better expedite its work.

The Council divided its work into two (2) banks of committees: Administrative and Mission.

The Administrative Committees are:

- Fund Development
- Budget
- Nominations/Leadership Development/Evaluation
- Communication

The Missions Committees are:

- Relations with the United Methodist Church  
To address, dialogue
- Relations with Other Coalitions, within and outside of the UMC
- Spiritual and Theological Formation
- Chapter and Membership Development

The Council will thus divide its workload between members and allow members to specialize in certain areas of work.

For further information about this committee structure or for any other questions about the Affirmation National Council, please contact our Council Co-Convenors Gary Shephard and Judy WestLee [see contact information on page 3].

## Council Members

Joanne Reich  
Bloomington, NJ

John R. Calhoun  
Oklahoma City OK

Tim Forbess  
Washington, DC

David L. Gunnell  
Evanston, IL

R. Wesley Hagan  
Arlington, VA

Walt Jackson  
Madison, WI

Jeanne Knepper  
Portland, OR

Mary Padilla  
Corona, NY

Amory Peck  
Bellingham, WA

Kathryn Mitchem  
Ashland City, TN

Clarence R. Norment  
Mechanicsville, VA

Kenneth I. Rowe  
San Francisco, California

Gary Shephard  
Haslet, TX

Steven Earl Webster  
Madison, WI

Judy WestLee  
Minneapolis, MN

## Affirmation Council

Spokespersons  
R. Wesley Hagan  
Arlington, VA

Jeanne Knepper  
Portland, OR

### Committee structure focuses new energy

To enhance its work during and between meetings, the Affirmation National Council has adopted a committee structure, with each Council member belonging to one administrative and one mission committee. The administrative committees are Budget Development and Financial Management, Communications, and Nominations and Leadership Development. The mission committees are Program, Chapter Development, Spiritual and Theological Formation, and Lynx [Connections to organizations outside of Affirmation]. It is the intent of the Council to develop a stable financial base, to begin offering national programs

and to re-energize and support local chapters.

### Religious roundtable

Council member Rick Huskey represented Affirmation at the November meeting of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable. The Roundtable brings together leaders and representatives of religious action groups that seek to increase the voice and inclusion of LGBT people in religious circles. Members are currently working on theologies of transformation and examining anti-Semitism within their organizations and mutual work. In addition to Rick, United Methodists were represented by Kathryn Johnson of the Methodist Federation for Social Action and

by Dan Vera of the Reconciling Ministries Network.

### Long range planning process

Thomas Jefferson suggested that governments ought to reframe themselves [he suggested through revolution] about every 20 years to stay on the mark. Affirmation last reorganized its mission and structure with a Long Range Planning Process at the end of the 1980s. The National Council thinks it is time to invite friends and members to participate in another planning process. To this end, the Council has adopted a new long range planning process.

The Council will identify a 12-member task force that would represent diversity of age, race, geography, gender and clergy/lay status. The task force will meet at least three times, to plan listening posts, to develop a vision and mission statement, and to develop structure and by-laws. As a part of the process of gathering information, the task force would convene listening posts in the East, Midwest and West [seeking to meet in places near the middle between North and South] that would each have three components:

invite specific leaders to meet with a subcommittee to talk about their understandings of what Affirmation is and/or should be; invite Affirmation members to speak about what they want for Affirmation; and specifically solicit input from youth about what they want in Affirmation by holding the listening posts on campuses with Reconciling Campus Ministries.

In addition to the listening posts, Affirmation members would be invited to submit written statements about what aspects of the work are most important to people.

### Affirmation presence and participation at the RMN Convocation

University of Puget Sound

1500 N. Warner St., Tacoma, Washington

**July 26th Pre-Convo Forum led by Affirmation's Spiritual Formation and Strategic Visioning Committees**

**Affirmation Chapter Formation Workshop led by Affirmation's Chapter and Membership Committee**

**Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Display**

**July 27th, 5:30p.m., Banquet**

**Tickets for banquet:**

**\$6.00 if attending the convocation**

**\$14.00 if not attending the convocation**

**Reservation deadline: July 20, 2001**

**July 28th, 9:00p.m., Dance**



## **Roger Kruse** **1946-2001**

Longtime Affirmation member Roger Kruse died early in the evening on March 5, 2001, after a 10-month struggle with cancer. Roger valiantly battled against the disease while maintaining his work, social, church, and political involvements. Roger was an very active member of Affirmation and served on the Coordinating Committee [before the bylaws were changed to form the current Council structure], as well as being an energetic fundraiser for Affirmation. Affirmation benefited greatly from Roger living throughout the U.S. due to his many business travels.

"When he learned that his doctor believed the cancer was no longer treatable, Roger decided to get out of here as soon as possible," wrote Mark Bowman. "He had the company of many friends his last weekend. He was strong in his faith that he was going home to God. His sister was with him when he died."

Roger served as Vice President for Administration and Human Resources at the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago. From 1973-1993, he worked as Executive Director of Mesa Education Association, Mesa, AZ, and Director of Human Resources, General Conference, MIS, and Administrative Services for the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church in Evanston, IL, from 1993-1996. Roger was born in the Midwest town of Lincoln, Nebraska. He was 54.

Memorial gifts may be sent to: Kruse Memorial Fund, Northern Pines Good Samaritan Center, Route 1, Box 600, Blackduck, MN 56630.

"Life eternal is to know that God is Love, and that nothing can separate those who love. In recognizing this truth, death loses its reality." -- Emily V. Hammond

## **Igniting ministries campaign**

Turn on the TV and you may run across the latest in UM advertising, attractive words of welcome, ending with variations on the phrase, "The UMC: our hearts, minds and doors are always open." How ironic, given the 1996 campaign, asking the General Conference [GC] to "Open the Doors" to it LGBT members. Has The UMC forgotten that LGBT people also watch television? Following so close on the arrests of GC 2000, can we to understand these invitations as anything other than lies?

There is one way, perhaps. The Igniting Ministries campaign includes grants to teach local churches how to be welcoming of the peel attracted by the ads. We suggest that those funds also be used to prepare churches to welcome and celebrate the presence of LGBT people, their families and friends. If this were the case, then we could truly celebrate the campaign and believe the invitation. Without such intent, the Igniting Ministries Campaign is indelibly cruel, pursuing LGBT people even into the privacy of their own homes with false messages of toxic welcome.

## **Join the journey**

The Funds Development Committee is proud of Affirmation's past history, excited about our recent accomplishments, and confident of the promise of the future. As our momentum builds and society continues to lead the church in welcoming LGBT people, we realize that our future is built on three foundations: people, ideas, and money.

We recognize that the vast financial resources of our opponents and the large size of the UMC are challenges for us. But we also believe our skilled and committed people and our powerful ideas are adequate for the task. That leaves us with money as the area where we need focus to catapult the people and ideas to even greater accomplishments.

The Funds Development Committee is implementing two fundraising programs. Our *Join The Journey* general solicitation will be in your mailboxes soon. Affirmation Council members have already committed themselves to 100% participation. We will follow that with our major gifts campaign in honor of the 25th Anniversary of Affirmation.

Watch for our appeals and participate generously. Our seed money is one of the keys to creating the welcoming church we all envision.

*Jim Palmquist*  
*Fund Development Chairman.*

## **Corporate Annual Meeting**

Affirmation: United Methodists for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns, Inc., will hold its annual meeting on July 26, 2001, 4:15 p.m., at the University of Puget Sound, 1500 N. Warner St., Tacoma, Washington. The agenda will include the election of members to the Board of Directors, and other matters of concern before the corporation.

## A book review

### Swinging On The Garden Gate: A Spiritual Memoir

By Elizabeth J. Andrew, Skinner House Books, an imprint of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Copyright 2000

Ten years ago, when my partner-to-be and I were cautiously exploring what we knew to be both a spiritual and sexual attraction for one another, we eagerly sought out any authors who might be telling a story we could take into our lives. What a joy, what a life-affirming joy, it would have been if *Swinging on the Garden Gate* existed then. What a treat to have this book now.

Elizabeth Andrew, a writing instructor and spiritual director living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, shares the story of her life, hoping her example will lead us to our own storytelling. "What follows is my attempt to recognize that spark of spirit embedded in the solid matter of my life ... The word comes alive when we claim what is sacred [life-giving, fundamental, charged with mystery and frightfully beautiful] within our stories. I hunger to hear sacred stories. As a gift to encourage others, I offer my own."

Running through her book is Elizabeth's profound belief in the truth of childhood. The cover photograph is of four-year-old Elizabeth. In the photo, she has placed herself at an open gate. "It seems the world I am entering is magnificent. How could it not be? Ivy spills over the brick walls, the steps lead down to adventure, and my parents are behind and before me. My father never spoke of God, but he had this for faith: There are places God meant for us to find, and we must journey until we come to them."

The image of garden becomes central to the book. Elizabeth begins working with Sue, a spiritual director, and after four months of intensive talk, Elizabeth comes to her session with a confession. "I know I won't get anywhere in my relationship with God until I tell the truth about my sexuality." "If I want to live with integrity, I have to say that sometimes I am drawn to men and sometimes I am drawn to women. I haven't acted on this since I've realized this. But I know my body. I'm bisexual."

Sue's response is "How are you with God about this, Elizabeth?" "Her initial concern was my relationship with the sacred, not for the sake of saving my soul, but for the sustenance of my well-being." In answer to the question, Elizabeth reached for her journal, and began to sketch. What emerged was a lush garden, hidden behind a wall of overgrown grass, and locked within an arched door of heavy oak. What Elizabeth thought at first might be a picture of the Garden of Eden and its temptations, she recognized instead as a place of truth and beauty. Sue named it with delight as "the secret garden." Ms. Andrew weaves this image throughout her book, opening each chapter with a quotation from Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

Having immersed myself in *Swinging on the Garden Gate*, I feel I know Elizabeth Andrew well, for she was so very generous with her story. I urge you to treat yourself to *Swinging on the Garden Gate*. There you'll discover her story of solitary travel, of grief and loss, of fire and death. You'll read, especially, of great, great faith and joy. Elizabeth's book is not a retelling of events. Rather it is her recognition that every facet of life can be examined for the truth contained within. She remembers a childhood visit to a Benedictine monastery, and a chance encounter with a blue-eyed, elderly monk who looked at her for a moment. "That look shook me to the core. I was a child, and this holy man had looked into my eyes. He seemed to recognize an essential part of my identity that I didn't yet know existed." Later in the book, she confesses to Sue that even though "I was a female, I wasn't Catholic, I wasn't even straight," for the rest of her childhood she had wanted to be a monk. Throughout the volume you'll uncover a life saturated with a sense of the holy. "...God is so profoundly incarnate that we learn of God mostly through a mother holding us to her breast, or through a community's *Gloria Patria*, or through a place that laps at our soul."

I thank the author for her honesty about the cost of openness. As Linda and I searched the shelves ten years ago, we were looking for the courage we lacked within ourselves. Ms. Andrews acknowledges the consequences of truthfulness. "When we come out, we take a buried truth, an inward reality residing near the soul, and pull it to the surface where it wreaks havoc on every perpetuated falsehood." She continues, "There is no such thing as a private coming out. Truth telling, like prayer, fuses the personal and public realms. It reconnects the fragments within us that are the result of falsification, and joins us to others willing to risk similar positions of integrity."

As you finish Elizabeth's story, perhaps you'll take up her challenging invitation, to tell your own story. Tell it first because "Telling our stories is an act of resistance against institutions that would rather tell stories about us." Tell it, more importantly, because it yearns within you to be told. "Lay your story down. Lay your story down against the white margins of a page, or lay it with low tones into the listening ears of friends, or lay it from the pulpit over the startled minds of the congregation. There is this soul we all share that needs to be fed. It is aching for your story, for its emotional truths and its flights of fancy, because you must love yourself with leaps and bounds in order to have the courage to tell it. And this is what it aches for most of all."

Amory Peck

## Please join us for the day

*Telling our stories is an act of resistance against institutions that would rather tell stories about us.*  
*Swinging On The Garden Gate*, Elizabeth J. Andrew

We hope that by now you've decided to attend RMN's "Revival!" and that your convocation plans include Affirmation's Pre-Convo Forum on Thursday, July 26, 2001.

Affirmation's Forum will be a time of story telling. We'll feature Elizabeth Andrew, a bisexual United Methodist, spiritual director. Elizabeth will share her story, helping the rest of us to find our voices, too.

From the stories will come a discussion of our hopes, fears, and dreams, then an exploration of how Affirmation might be able to address those issues.

We'll conclude the day with a closing worship created by Rev. Dr. Jeanne Knepper, Affirmation's spokesperson. Jeanne will remind us of the successes we've already experienced, and will share her personal encouraging story.

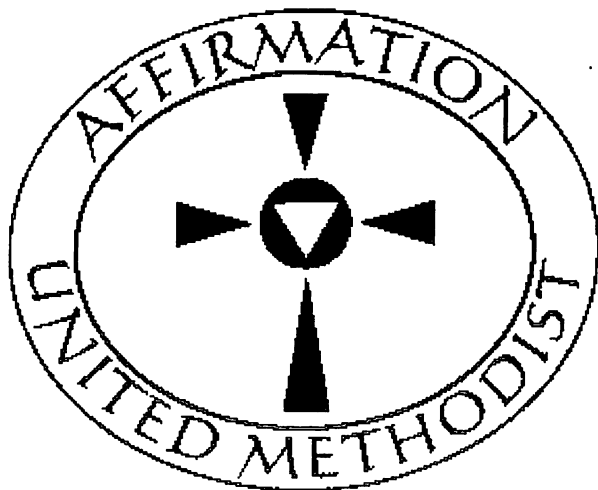
For more details see ***Affirmation: United Methodist Celebrates 25 years*** on page 13.

"Tell it [your story] more importantly, because it yearns within you to be told."

*Swinging On The Garden Gate*, Elizabeth J. Andrew

## Good news Great news!

Bishop Edward Paup of the Oregon-Idaho Conference intends to appoint Rev. Jeanne Knepper, longtime Affirmation member and activist, as the pastor of University Park United Methodist Church, a Reconciling Congregation. Jeanne has been the Director of Shalom Ministries since 1993. The Shalom Ministries Board will conduct a search for a new director. For more information, contact Shalom Ministries at 503-760-4215.



## Rumor Control, Spokespersons and Official Positions

Since General Conference [GC] 2000, the rumor has come around now and again that Affirmation has changed course. That instead of advocating for change within the United [some say Untied is more correct] Methodist Church we're now advocating for the formation of a new church.

This rumor is not true.

We're putting together a long range planning committee to find out what direction the membership wants us to take post GC 2000. The last long-range plan was done over ten years ago, so it's time to do a new one. Until the long range planning process is complete, there will be no change in the mission or direction of Affirmation.

Remember too that the official position of Affirmation on any subject can only be annunciated by the Affirmation spokespersons. These are currently Jeanne Knepper and Randy Hagan. Anything you hear about Affirmation is **not** the official position of the organization unless it has come from one of these two people.

If you should hear an interesting rumor concerning Affirmation, contact our spokespersons and check it out.

Gary Shephard  
Affirmation Co-convenor



## National Religious Leadership Roundtable declares "Love Won Out" Conferences to be misguided and dangerous

A national group of religious leaders today responded to the latest anti-gay "Love Won Out" conference, which was held Philadelphia last April. The conference is part of a series of events held around the nation sponsored by Focus on the Family, a conservative religious organization. The events are aimed at convincing LGBT people, as well as their clergy, family and friends, that sexuality can and should be changed through reparative therapy and a conversion to Christianity.

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable, which represents leaders from 40 faith-based traditions, denounced the anti-LGBT message being promoted by Focus on the Family. The Roundtable is convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and was founded with Equal Partners in Faith.

"These discredited attempts to change sexual orientation are really only suppressing behavior, not changing the natural attractions that are in a persons heart," said Rev. Bob Gibeling, program executive of Lutherans Concerned and spokesperson for the Roundtable. "Any ministry that uses fear, guilt and shame to try to change someone's sexual orientation is not only unethical, but is also putting themselves and their ministry in legal jeopardy because of the professional medical association's clear stand against it."

"Many individuals in houses of worship, denominations, and religiously affiliated organizations throughout the United States, believe that LGBT individuals do not need to be repaired or saved from their sexual orientation or gender identity," the Roundtable said in a statement. "On the basis of medical opinion and our various religious beliefs, personal testimonies and first hand experience, we believe that reparative therapy is not appropriate for LGBT individuals. The effects such practices have on the majority of people range from useless to extremely harmful, and may be a contributing factor to self-destructive behavior and many suicide attempts by LGBT individuals."

According to the American Psychological Association [APA] statement on homosexuality which was released in July, 1994, "The research on homosexuality is very clear. Homosexuality is neither mental illness nor moral depravity. It is simply the way a minority of our population expresses human love and sexuality. Research findings suggest that efforts to repair homosexuals are nothing more than social prejudice garbed in psychological accouterments."

The assessment of the American Psychological Association is also held by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Medical Association. Yet, Focus on the Family continues to advance the harmful and demeaning message at their conferences that LGBT people need "treatment."

Despite repudiation from virtually the entire psychological and medical community, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a speaker at the conferences and president of the National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), tells parents to tell their kids that "homosexuality is really a psychological problem and that many of them, if they really work hard at it, can overcome their homosexuality, get married and have families. This is basically what we want to teach our kids."

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable considers that ex-gay testimonies featured at the "Love One Out" conferences are "based not only on the misguided belief that everyone should be heterosexual, but also that everyone should belong to the same narrow religious view." These conferences deny the reality that a broad array of religious traditions throughout time and across the world embrace GLBT people and celebrate their unique sexuality as a divine gift.

*See Round Table, page 9*

## Affirmation Chapter And Membership Outreach

Affirmation is seeing renewed interest in starting local Affirmation chapters. The National Council has formed a committee to revise the chapter start-up guidelines. [I almost shudder to admit that. At work forming a committee is usually the polite way of indicating that we hope something will die off and never be heard from again.] Hopefully the revised guidelines will be ready to distribute in draft form by July. Remember, these will only be guidelines. Organize your local chapter however you see fit. Do what works for you. And let us know how your organization differs from what we suggest in the guidelines. We'll incorporate your ideas and suggestions into the next revision. There's no need to have everyone reinventing the wheel if they don't have to. [Of course, sometimes its *fun* to reinvent the wheel, but you don't always have the time or mental energy.] Let me know if you're interested in forming a new chapter or reviving an inactive chapter and I'll put you on the list to receive the updated guidelines.

If you're part of an active chapter, let me know that too. We send newsletters to 34 Affirmation chapters, and all we know is that the US Postal Service doesn't return them as undeliverable.

Drop me, Gary Shephard, a line at [redacted] Watauga, TX [redacted] or email [redacted]

*Gary Shephard  
Affirmation Co-convenor*



## October 2000 Meeting Summary

The Affirmation Council met over Columbus Day weekend. As I'm sure you can well imagine, our chief topic of discussion was General Conference [GC] 2000 and where do we go from here?

We have no idea what our eventual direction will be. We recognize even among the Council that we are not all of one mind, whether to continue to try to change to the church, or to form our own denomination.

Since the last-long range planning process by Affirmation was undertaken in 1989, we decided that it was time to go back to the membership to get your opinions. We'll conduct listening posts and gather input on what you feel Affirmation should be. We expect the whole process to take 12 - 18 months. Look for details here and in the [oh, how old fashioned] snail mail newsletter.

One of our Council members brought to our attention that GC 2000 might not have been as bad as we first thought. Yes, there's still a lot of language in the Discipline that we'd rather was not there. Yes, our votes went down by a wide margin. But one important change that passed was that our pastors are now required, per the Discipline, to minister to LGBT persons. There were a lot of changes sent in by Good News and Confessing Movement and most of these [if not all] were rejected. Jeanne Knepper will be presenting a tally of "who won/who didn't win" in our next newsletter.

And we're looking to start new Affirmation chapters where there's interest. We get inquiries every so often for information or help in this

area. We've formed a committee to revise the chapter start-up guidelines, and to champion chapter issues. This will be available in a few months and will include one or more sample sets of bylaws. Once we get organized we'll want to know from you which Affirmation chapters are still active.

And, of course, Affirmation is 25 this year! [Does this mean we finally get a break on our car insurance?] We're planning a celebration to take place in July 27-28, 2001. GC 2000 left us just a little tuckered out so we thought we'd wait on the party until we felt like doing it up right. Time and location to be determined.

*Gary Shephard*  
*Affirmation Co-convenor*

## Round Table

*from page 8*

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable members are leaders of over 40 faith-based organizations including Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Mormon, Black church, and other religious and spiritual traditions. Together they work in partnership with other justice-seeking groups to: amplify the voice of pro-LGBT faith organizations in public discourse; promote understanding of and respect for GLBT people within society at large and in communities of faith; promote understanding and respect within LGBT communities for variety of faith paths and for religious liberty; achieve commonly held goals that promote equality, spirituality and justice. It is convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and founded with Equal Partners in Faith. For more information, visit:

<<http://www.nglrf.org/pi/nrlr>>.

## Information

I am interested in knowing more about:

- ☐ Becoming a member of National Affirmation and receiving the quarterly newsletter.
- ☐ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation. Enclosed is a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

City\_\_\_\_\_State\_\_\_\_\_Zip\_\_\_\_\_

Phone\_\_\_\_\_Annual Conference\_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address [please be case-specific]\_\_\_\_\_

All Affirmation correspondence is mailed discretely.

All contributions to National Affirmation are tax deductible.

### Ministry or Repentance?

I believe that I have a ministry calling to help cross-dressers integrate into mainstream Christianity. The general view of the church is that there is no ministry but rather a need to repent of my cross-dressing and pledge to cease the sinful practice. My prayer is that after reading this article you will conclude that such a ministry is necessary.

In my cross-dressing community speaking debut, I described my journey to become a complete person. As I spoke, the memories of the pain I had endured from repeated rejection came flooding back. I had seen the impact on countless others, lost relationships, escapes into drugs and alcohol, ruined lives of quiet desperation. The ridicule and rejection expressed by society is so strong that the most consistent advice I have received was to never tell anyone! There is an incredible fear that we will lose our wives, our children, our jobs, everything of importance if anyone learns our secret. That fear becomes even stronger for those who wish to have a personal relationship with God. We are extremely hesitant to bring the question to our minister for fear of being branded as a sinner, excluded from the church and separated from God. So most of us say nothing and continue to hide the truth causing still more guilt, shame and pain.

Does that pain matter? Some religious leaders say it is a good thing because we need to hear the hard message of sin and the need for repentance. They explain that they are speaking out of love. But what if they are wrong and the simple act of cross-dressing is not an abomination after all?

There is only one specific reference to cross-dressing in the Bible -- Deuteronomy 22:5. If you examine a series of commentaries you will find that there are many different interpretations of the text. There are also several other important factors to be considered in determining how to apply that verse to today's world. Given the lack of clarity on this matter, I have come to believe that it is wrong to automatically brand a cross-dresser as a sinner in need of repentance. Instead we need to look at the specific circumstances of individual person before making any kind of judgment. If the church took that approach, we would be able to deal with real problems in a constructive way. Significant dialogue must replace the rush to judgment.

I have circulated several versions of my argument to thousands of religious leaders and have been dismayed by their reaction. The overwhelming majority has not responded in any way. If my argument is correct, many of God's kids are being prevented from enjoying an intimate relationship with God. By not saying or doing anything is not a minister tacitly approving of the verbal and physical attacks being made on these people? Is that form of apathy towards our neighbor's plight appropriate for a Christian leader?

The standard response is to simply brand me with a big red "S" as a rebellious sinner in need of repentance. None of them has ever directly answered the points of my argument. The notes were so angry and hurtful that many nights I was in tears. My wife couldn't understand how Christians could speak of love and say such destructive things. Some responses: "Take the verse in a totally literal sense. Make no effort to understand the context, implied meaning or any other factors. This is what it says. -- Period!" "Shifts the argument to vaguer more subjective issues such as God is not the author of confusion or God desires to maintain the distinctions between the sexes." Or "Demands submission to their authority as a spiritual leader whose interpretation must take precedence over mine by virtue of their training and position."

The following article is the by-product of years of searching and questioning. I hope that you can hear its message with your heart because that is how it is intended. There is real pain and suffering and separation from God that must be repaired. I simply ask that you set aside any preconceptions you might have while you prayerfully consider the contents.

#### Cross-Dressing & The Bible

The strongest Biblical argument against cross-dressing is Deuteronomy 22:5, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God." It is the only verse to directly address the question. Taken in an absolutely literal sense it is used to label a cross-dresser as a sinner in need of repentance. If the cross-dresser fails to repent he is characterized as being in a state of rebellion against God.

Did you ever consider the implications of such a strictly literal interpretation? Virtually everyone applies the prohibition vigorously to men, but if it is wrong for a man to wear a dress, then logically is it not equally wrong for a woman to wear pants? Women routinely wear "male" clothing to church and no one calls them an abomination. Curiously the prohibition is first levied towards women and then secondarily towards men. Rather an odd sequence unless the true meaning of the verse has more application to women than to men. How can we justify this dual standard?

It should also be noted that Jesus and the disciples wore what amounts to floor length dresses. Why was it okay to wear a "dress" then but wrong to do so today? The earliest appearance of today's trousers was in Persia for the females in the king's harem. These garments had no fronts or backs and looked like a cowboy's chaps. Even by today's standards, we call them exceptionally suggestive. Why was it okay for women to wear "pants" then and even now when they are considered men's clothing?

## View

If I were to say, "He lost his shirt, He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, or He is in hot water," would any reasonable person take the position that those statements mean exactly what they say? To truly understand, don't we have to take into account the culture, language and prevalent customs of the times? Doesn't achieving true understanding become even more difficult with the passage of significant periods of time? How can we ignore those changes and take ancient statements absolutely literally when we wouldn't do that for words spoken yesterday?

There is a deep chasm between life in Biblical times and today's world. The Israelites were forbidden to draw pictures, carve statues, or make graven images. They used parables and allegories to portray and explain spiritual ideas which even simple folk easily understood but never took literally. The Semitic languages are filled with idiomatic expressions that are virtually incomprehensible to the untrained Western mind. Without an intimate understanding of the customs of those times and their subtle impact on life and language, it is difficult to obtain an accurate interpretation. Can we safely ignore all these details and simply say, "That's what it says?"

If we insist on a literal interpretation of Verse 5, then aren't we also obligated to apply the same literal interpretation to other verses as well? Two other verses in the same chapter are curiously related to clothing. Verse 11, "Don't wear clothing woven from two kinds of thread: for instance, wool and linen together." Why isn't there a great disturbance about wearing shirts and blouses made of polyester and cotton? Verse 12 says that, "You must sew tassels on the four corners of your cloaks." Wearing tassels today is more likely to be associated with a strip show than to be following God's word. Why doesn't anyone mention these verses?

Verse 22 has interesting ramifications, "If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lie with the woman and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel." If we brand a cross-dresser as an abomination, aren't we similarly required to put adulterers to death?

Finally, Verses 28 and 29 state, "If a man finds a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found, then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver and she shall be his wife; because he has humbled her, he may not put her away all his days." Are we to force every man who has seduced a virgin to pay a dowry, marry her, and prohibit a divorce for his lifetime?

We have discussed six verses from one chapter and I don't know anyone who consistently follows the literal interpretation of all of them. From Genesis through Deuteronomy there are 5,851 verses and some making even these situations appear mundane. Are we to take them all literally as well? If we don't take them all literally, how do we decide which ones to follow and which ones to ignore? Who gets to decide?

Since I am not a Biblical scholar I turned to existing Bible commentaries to obtain a better understanding of this verse. Here is a summary of the interpretations of 30 Commentaries with the number of each response shown in parentheses:

- Pagan religious connotation (12)
- Deviant sexual practices or moral issues (9)
- Maintain proper distinction between the sexes (8)
- Part of a collection of laws with a common theme (5)
- Definitely not about simple cross-dressing (5)
- Magical connection related to disguise or deceit (4)
- Related to armor or wartime attire (3)
- No comment (3)
- Hard line literal interpretation to be applied to all cross-dressing (2)
- Doesn't apply because we aren't under the law (1)

A handful spoke with absolute certainty, but about one-third offered multiple possible explanations hence 52 interpretations from thirty sources. Over half used qualifiers such as likely, may/might, possible/probable, seems, some or suggests/suppose. With such a diversity of opinion, how can anyone insist that their view is the correct one and impose it on others without allowing any questioning? Which view is correct?

~~Based on the preceding argument, I believe that a blanket condemnation of cross-dressers is unwarranted.~~ I believe that the church must begin to look at the specifics of each case and respond to the needs of the individual person. I believe that mainstream Christian ministers need to take positive steps to bring cross-dressers into the fold of the church. I believe that my ministry is to encourage those steps to be taken. What do you think?

Note: Related articles can be found at <<http://members.aol.com/plantloveseeds>> Planting Loving Seeds.

*Rachel Miller*



## Oakland Meeting Summary

The Affirmation National Council met in Oakland the weekend of January 13-15, 2001.

Our first item of discussion was the Christian Social Action magazine article written by Jeanne Knepper [See the article *Resist!* on page 1].

Affirmation continues to participate in the National Religious Leadership Roundtable. Our financial team will bring a recommendation for financial support to our next meeting in May.

The Fundraising Development committee met the weekend previous to the Council meeting and brought a detailed report. The committee recommends that we streamline our information flow, that we conduct an internal audit, and that we adopt an organization-wide calendar to coordinate all dates, particularly committee activities. They also suggested that we offer spiritual retreats, have an alternate year membership meeting [off cycle from the RMN convocations], and start working on strategies for General Conference [GC] 2004.

The Chapter and Membership committee addressed the issue of why we should start forming chapters again. There are several benefits to the national organization. Chapters provide a "farm team" to train volunteers and leadership. Chapters can conduct advocacy and can provide spiritual support at the local level. They can also help identify candidates for GC. Chapters affiliated with the national organization can benefit too. We can identify national members within their geographical area. We can provide how-to information on how to start and run local chapters. The committee outlined a plan to identify and contact local chapters.

Affirmation will officially celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary [which was last year] July 27<sup>th</sup> as part of the RMN Convocation. The anniversary was not celebrated last year because of GC.

We're still working on putting the Strategic Planning Process in place. It's been more than ten years since the last long range plan was put into place. We need to conduct listening posts and see where our membership wants us to go.

During the May Council meeting in Minneapolis, some members of the Affirmation National Council will be meeting with the RMN board. There hasn't been enough direct contact between the two organizations recently.

We're looking at clarifying the wording of our mission statement. The listing of caucus membership would include family and allies. This would enable us to drop the clarifying statement that normally accompanies the existing mission statement.

Our meeting was hosted by Sam Wilson at the Washington Inn, a hotel in downtown Oakland, across from the convention center. The hotel is lovely, and within easy walking distance of several small and interesting restaurants. Many thanks to Sam for opening up his hotel to us for the meeting, and to his efficient and friendly staff. Having the entire Council stay in one-location cuts down on the housing logistics and gives us more time to do the work of Affirmation.

The spring council meeting will be held May 18-21, 2001 in Minneapolis.

The fall council meeting will be held October 5-8, 2001. We're looking to find a retreat center in the Birmingham, AL area.

## Affirmation: United Methodist Celebrates 25 years

Affirmation will start its 25th observance with RMN's Convocation "Revival!" to be held on Tacoma, Washington's, University of Puget Sound campus in July 2001.

On **July 26** during the Pre-Convo, Affirmation will host a forum of story telling. Featuring Elizabeth Andrew, a bisexual, United Methodist, spiritual director, author of *Swinging On The Garden Gate* [see page 6]. From the stories will come a discussion of our hopes, fears, and dreams, and then an exploration of how Affirmation might be able to address those issues. The event will conclude with a closing worship created by Rev. Dr. Jeanne Knepper, Affirmation's spokesperson.

On **July 27** at 5:30 pm, Affirmation will be hosting its 25th Celebration **Banquet**. Tickets for the banquet are \$6.00 if you are register for the convocation, \$14.00 if not registered for the convocation. **Dinner reservations are due by July 20, 2001.**

Affirmation will be also hosting the RMN's Saturday night **Dance** on **July 28th** at 9:00 pm.

Please come to one or all the events. Help celebrate Affirmation's 25th anniversary at University of Puget Sound, 1500 N. Warner St., Tacoma, Washington.

Dinner reservations are due by **July 20, 2001**. To make your reservation, e-mail at <umaffirmation@yahoo.com>, or phone 847/733-9590.

Gary Shephard  
Affirmation Co-convenor